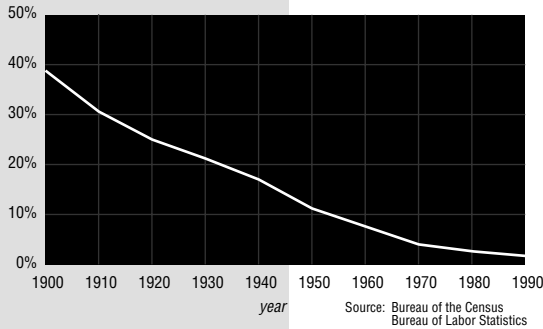
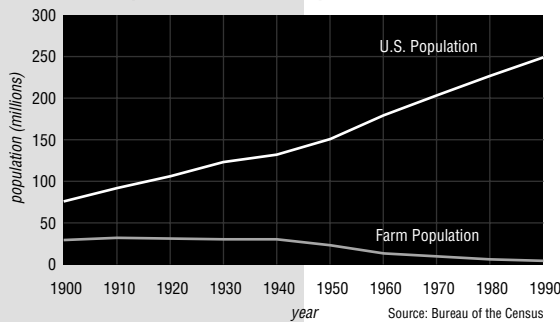


# Farm Population and Labor

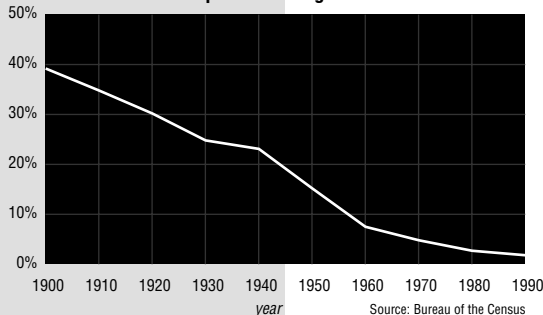
**Percent of U.S. Labor Force Working on Farms: 1900 - 1990**



**U.S. Population and Farm Population: 1900 - 1990**



**Percent of U.S. Population Living on Farms: 1900 - 1990**



Another striking change occurring in the agricultural sector during the past century involves farm labor and population. Farm labor requirements declined steadily due to mechanization, economic conditions, and the western expansion of agriculture coming to an end.

The increased use of machines to perform work formerly done by humans and then by animals raised farm efficiency while reducing the need for farm labor. The Great Depression left many farm laborers unemployed until the economic boom during World War II created employment opportunities in urban centers and led to a large migration from rural areas. The change in emphasis from development of new agricultural land to more intensive farming on existing land also contributed to lower demand for agricultural labor.

Later in the century, increases in the cost of production--with relatively no increase in prices received for production--were also a factor in driving individuals away from the farm. The large sums of money needed to purchase the technology and inputs required to stay competitive made farming more risky, and farm operators were required to manage resources more efficiently to stay in business. Increasingly, farming was seen as a less lucrative employment option when compared to jobs off the farm. As a result, many farmers switched to non-farm occupations for their primary source of income, and children from farm families chose careers off the farm.

The combined effect of these factors resulted in an increasingly smaller percentage of the U.S. labor force working on farms and a steady reduction in the share of the U.S. population living on farms. The health of rural economies often suffered as a result.